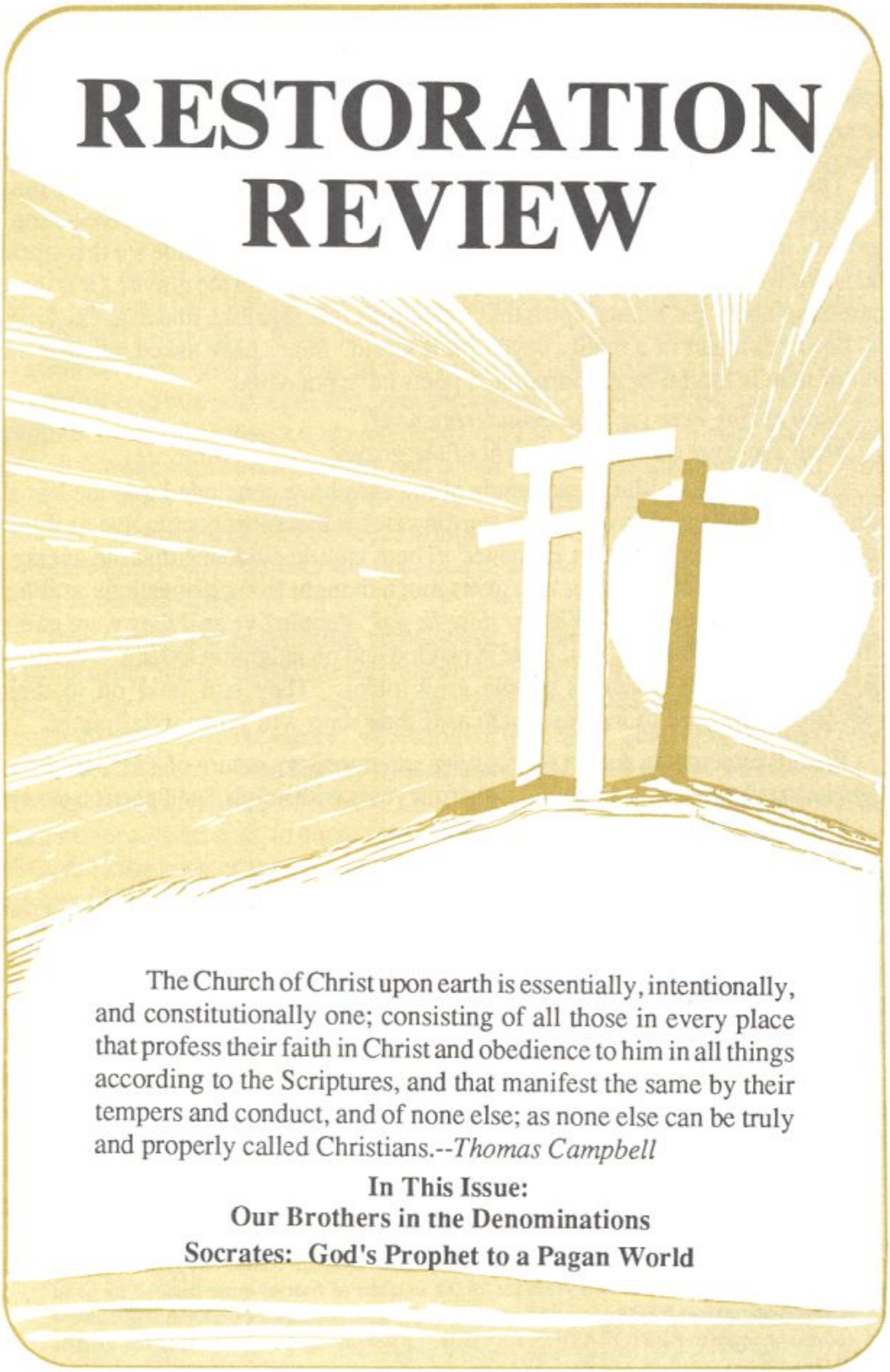
RESTORATION REVIEW



The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.--*Thomas Campbell*

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The Hope of the Believer...No. 13

THIS WORLD IS NOT OUR HOME

He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him. —Lk. 20:38

This world is not our home. What a staggering affirmation it is! From the time of the ancient philosophers one of the weightier issues of "the great conversation" has been man's relationship to this world. Is the human specie made for this world and is this world its destiny? Does all that we call life end with the grave? Or is there something about the human spirit that transcends this sensible, material existence and becomes a part of a reality beyond this world. Sages have asked whether the soul of man is mortal or immortal, and poets have pondered:

Shall spring ever visit the mouldering urn?

Shall day ever dawn on the night of the grave?

Even if the most illustrious minds of the ages have concluded that the life of man reaches beyond this world, the startling fact is that most people live as if this world is all there is to human existence. There is little evidence that the average person, whether "religious" or not, gives much thought to such questions as *What* is *man?, Whence came he?, Whither does he go?* People live as if they were going to be in this world forever, as if there is no God and no judgment to face. This does not seem to change even as people grow older. They still hold on to their possessions and seek to increase them as if their days will go on indefinitely.

We are reluctant to accept the fleeting and transitory nature of life, a truth Ps. 90 seeks to teach when it says, "We finish our years with a sigh," and goes on to say:

The days of *our lives are seventy years;*

And if by reason of strength they are eighty years.

Then follows one of the great passages of the Bible: "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." It is an appropriate prayer, for if when we realize the brevity of life we are in a position to get our values in order. That is wisdom, learning that this world is not our home and that we are in this world in order to prepare for the next one.

Accepting this simple but profound truth opens the way to still other truths. If this world is not our home, then there is a reality beyond matter. If there is a reality beyond matter, then there is a God who is in charge and in control. If there is a God who is in charge and in control, then he has a plan for me in this world. If God has a plan for me, I must find out what it is and respond to it responsibly.

Never mind about all the complex philosophical theories, if a person accepted this one proposition, that this world is not our home, it would change his entire outlook upon life. For if this world is not our home, then what is this world and what is the point of it? And if our home is elsewhere, how does that affect the way we live in this world? One soon finds himself at the very heart of religious faith.

In Lk. *20* our Lord encountered folk who had a problem with such matters, for being Sadducees they did not believe in such things as the resurrection and angels — and probably in no such thing as a home in another world. And so they were free to question Jesus with abandon, as if to cast everything to the wind. They did this by confronting him with a tall tale. A man took a wife and then died. In good Jewish tradition his brother married her and he died. The third brother also, and he died, and on it went until seven brothers had her as wife. Then the woman died. They wanted to know whose wife she would be in the resurrection. They were putting Jesus on, an attitude of, "Let's see him answer that one!" Even though it was not a sincere question, Jesus uses the occasion to say what I am saying here, that this world is not our home.

Jesus magnanimously treats these Jewish sectarians as if they were sincerely seeking truth, and his first point was that there are two worlds or two ages, "this age" and "that age." In "this age" people marry, Jesus told them, but "in that age and the resurrection" they do not marry. No reason for marriage! That makes the next world distinctly different. "Nor do they die anymore," the Lord added. In this world we die; in the next world we don't. Never die! What a mind-boggling truth! Furthermore, Jesus said, in the next world "they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." This makes it clear that we will be quite different in the next world. Already we are children of God, but then we will he "sons of God" in the sense that we will be God's family in our eternal home.

Jesus then did an unusual thing, though it was something any rabbi of that day might do. He took a passage of Scripture and gave it a most unique turn. In Exodus *3:* 6,15 Moses referred to Yahweh, or the Lord, as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus told the Sadducees that this shows that the dead are raised, a conclusion that hardly follows until one adds to it what Jesus added (Lk. 20:38): "For He is not the God of the dead but of the

living, for all live to him." This makes for a brilliant syllogism, one that could have only baffled the Sadducees. You will notice that Jesus supplies the minor premise, which forces the conclusion he drew.

Major premise: *God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (provided by Moses in Ex. 3:6)*

Minor premise: *God is not the God of the dead.* (provided by Jesus)

Conclusion: *Therefore, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not dead but living (and so there is a resurrection).*

The syllogism is valid, obeying all the rules of logic, and so the conclusion necessarily follows. To refute the argument the Sadducees would have to challenge the premises, which would be to deny what Moses said about God being the God of the patriarchs or to deny that God is the God of the living and not of the dead. Since this would be untenable they were left with the stunning conclusion that the patriarchs were then and there alive in the presence of God. The earth was not their home! No wonder the account closes with, "But after that they dared not question Him anymore."

While Matthew and Mark also tell this story, only Luke includes another startling statement. He records Jesus adding, "for all live to him." This would mean that what was true of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is true of us all. When the patriarchs died they did not leave home but went home. They are now at home with God. The same is true for us all. Death is not the end of life but the beginning of the life that is life indeed. All live unto him, whether in this world or the next, seems to he what Jesus is saying. This makes death unreal, except as the transition from one world to the next.

This all points to one of the greatest promises of Holy Writ: "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (Jn. 8:51). That promise being true this world is not our home. - *the Editor*

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IS JESUS WELCOME AT YOUR HOUSE?

The story of Zachaeus, which is told only by Luke, is more often than not made into a story for children. That may be because Zachaeus was a little fellow who climbed into a tree in order to sec Jesus. This is unfortunate if it means that adults may pay less attention

to it. Indeed, as a story it is as mature as anything in the Bible, and since it is a story of Jesus visiting in a private home it is especially relevant when it comes to relating Jesus to our home life. It is a story that leads us to ask if Jesus would be welcome at our house. Or it might prompt us to ask if our home is a place that Jesus would be pleased to visit.

Would our habits change if the Lord were a house guest, such as the way we talk to our children or the time we give to TV? Would we be sure to find time for reading and prayer if Jesus were around, and what would we talk about? What kinds of reading material would be available? If Jesus lived with us what impression would he have of our values? Would we really be comfortable having Jesus around the house?

The neat thing about the story of Zachaeus is that even though he was not a reputable person he was pleased to have Jesus as a guest in his home, and Jesus was pleased to go to his home, even when in going he was accused of associating with a sinner.

Jesus must have seen admirable qualities in the diminutive tax collector, such as his determination to make the most of his opportunity. Zachaeus was too busy a man to bother about seeing just any of the many itinerant teachers that made their way through the streets of his home town of Jericho. Busy as he was as a chief tax collector, which means he had assistants under his supervision, Zachaeus found the time to try to see Jesus of Nazareth, for he had heard much about him and he was curious. And it may have been something more than curiosity, for he may have been a troubled man, living as he had been, and he may have hoped that in Jesus he would see something different about life. Luke tells us that he wanted to see what Jesus was. So, he took advantage of his one opportunity in life. When he heard that Jesus was coming his way, he made a point of trying to see him, and he was ready to go to a lot of trouble to do so. Pressing business matters could wait.

The Lord must have also been impressed that Zachaeus overcame difficulties in his efforts to see him. The record says that he could not see Jesus because of the crowd. This was a common experience for Jesus. Even when he walked through a town crowds moved along with him. Zachaeus was not only small of stature, but he was undesirable company, being a despised publican. There were children in the crowd and other short people who were able to see Jesus, but the people, antagonistic toward him, would not accommodate him. Not to be deterred he ran ahead on down the road that he knew Jesus would take, and Luke tells us that he did indeed run. He was willing to sacrifice his dignity in order to fulfill his desire, even to climbing up a tree. Squirrels climb trees, but does the local assessor and collector of taxes?

It must have been some sight, Zachaeus positioned in that sycamore tree! It is something Jesus would have noticed anyway, but we can believe that he had prescience in this case as he did in the case of Nathaniel, whom he saw coming to him before he ever arrived

(Jn. 1:48-50). In his mind's eye Jesus saw Nathaniel under a tree and saw Zachaeus up a tree! This is evident, for when Jesus approaches the tree he calls Zachaeus by name, bidding him to hurry down, which indicates that the publican had scaled the tree some distance. Jesus always knew his man, and this time he knew he had met another who was not far from the kingdom of God. He had a penchant for "not far away" people. He not only urged the tax collector to hurry down out of the tree but he invited himself to dinner at his house!

That must have blown Zachaeus' mind. It was far more than he ever desired or even imagined, but we have the promise in Eph. 3:20 that God often behaves that way, doing "abundantly above all that we can ask or think." Zachaeus forsook his business for the day and ended up entertaining the Son of God in his home! It is another instance of how God's ways are far above our ways, as much higher as the heavens are above the earth, as Isa. 55:9 assures us. Zachaeus had one plan while God had another, and what a difference!

My favorite line in the story is Lk. 19:6 where it says that Zachaeus received Jesus joyfully, which is not always the case when one invites himself to dinner! I don't think this implies anything intimate, such as embracing Jesus with uncontrolled exuberance. It means that Zachaeus was delighted to have Jesus in his home, and since he was rich we can see him issuing orders on ahead, preparatory to Jesus' coming for dinner.

Again we can ask ourselves if we would go out of our way and overcome difficulties in order to see Jesus should he come our way, and would we he overjoyed to have him in our home? Jesus of course would be comfortable as a guest in our home if we were comfortable.

Our Lord must have also seen an inner goodness in the tax collector even if he was less than an exemplary person. We don't know what all was said during Jesus' visit to the rich man's home, but Zachaeus' resolution in the presence of Jesus is a clue. Or it may not be what Jesus said to him as much as it was the sheer presence of the Christ that led to his change of heart. Zachaeus said to Jesus, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor, and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold" (Lk. 19:8).

This was his commitment once he had a change of heart, for it is evident that he had not been living this way, otherwise he would not have been disreputable in the public eye. Jesus led him to repentance, and the story of Zachaeus tells us more about what repentance is than the best textbook definition. He not only had a change of heart, but he was ready to back it up with works worthy of such a change.

It is noteworthy that Zachaeus said nothing about doing the usual things of pious religion as evidence of his change. He did not say he would read the Torah with more diligence, pray more regularly, or attend synagogue more faithfully, even though Jesus would have approved of these things. Being with Jesus caused him to think more about the way he had treated others. He now thinks in terms of fairness, compassion, and generosity.

The Roman tax collectors would sometimes haul people into court on trumped up charges in order to exact more taxes. Zachaeus remembered that his wealth had come in part by such injustice. He resolved that in such cases he would restore fourfold. He had a lot of wrongs to make right, and he was determined to do so. That is repentance. The Mosaic law sometimes called for fivefold and fourfold restitution, as in Ex. 22:1 in the case of oxen and sheep, as did the Roman law. Zachaeus resolved to do no less. In those instances where he defrauded a person of taxes for his own benefit he would return to the oppressed four times what he had lost. Moreover, he would give a half of his wealth to the poor. Not to the priests or to the temple but to the poor.

Being with Jesus would certainly make one more conscious of the poor. If he were a guest in our home we might be reminded of the plight of the third world countries over against the abundance of our own land, and we might be smitten by the realization that we do so little to help the poor of the world.

The liberation theologians, who insist that the Bible teaches that God is on the side of the poor and against the rich (especially the rich who take advantage of the poor), point out that true repentance should emulate that of Zachaeus' change of heart, who gave up much of his wealth to the poor and amended his maltreatment of the oppressed on a four to one basis. They also remind us that most all of us Christians in the western countries of the world are rich, and we are rich in part because of unfair and insensitive trade policies with the underdeveloped countries. One such liberation theologian, a Catholic bishop in South America, shook his fist in defiance at the pope when he visited his country, challenging him to open the coffers of his rich church and share it with the poor of the world.

Yes, having Jesus around could be embarrassing, even dangerous. He might lead us to do something about all the money we spend in our churches on ourselves. We put multiplied billions into real estate. Even the preachers we support, often by impressive salaries, are not sent out to minister to dispossessed people, but to preach to us who hear the gospel over and over. The late Jimmie Lovell, an untiring supporter of missions among Churches of Christ, often said that no one has the right to hear the gospel twice until all the world has heard it once.

When Zachaeus showed evidence of a change of mind and heart in thinking more of others than himself, Jesus said that salvation had come to his house, for he was a son of Abraham. This means more than that Zachaeus was a Jew, for he was already that. It means that Zachaeus now represents the true faith of which Abraham is the father. Jesus is saying that Zachaeus' sense of justice, generosity, and compassion for the poor is what true religion is all about--more than going to church and doing acts of worship.

If Jesus moved among us as he did the people of Jericho, would we criticize him as they did for going to the home of a sinner? Would we be offended at him for associating with prostitutes, gays, runaways, addicts, and all the street people and the homeless who would need to bathe before we associated with them?

To those that criticized him for the company he kept Jesus had an answer, which may be the greatest part of the story of Zachaeus. "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost," he told them.

Jesus' mission is the church's mission. We are not here to build and maintain an institution for the sake of selfish pride, but to seek and to save the lost. That must be what Zachaeus saw in Jesus from his perch in the sycamore tree. He saw the one who had come to seek him out and to save him.

Is that not what people should see in the church of our time, yea, in us all who profess to follow in the way of Jesus of Nazareth?--the *Editor*

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Heroes and Reformers of History...No. 3

SOCRATES: GOD'S PROPHET TO A PAGAN WORLD

He was not a handsome man. Tradition has it that he had a bald head, great round face and protruding eyes, thick lips, and a snub nose. Anyone who came under his influence, however, soon forgot his ungainly appearance. Born in Athens as the son of a stonecutter, he lived virtually all his life in the marketplace of his native city. Unlike many other men of wisdom who wandered from city to city, he not only lived as a philosopher in Athens all 70 of his years but died as a martyr there in 399 B.C. at the hands of the state, executed because he taught people, especially the youth, that "the unexamined life is not worth living," which caused them to do such things as forsake the temples of the Greek gods.

If Athens can be described as the queen city of the ancient pagan world, Socrates can be identified as God's prophet to that illustrious pagan city. It is my conviction that God was in Socrates preparing the Greek mind for the coming of Christ. He himself was mindful of some such call, for he referred to himself as "God's gadfly" in that he saw it as his mission to sting the Athenians out of their moral lethargy at a time when the people were steeped in superstition and ignorance.

When Socrates walked the streets of Athens there was no knowledge of the one true God of heaven. Paganism ruled the land and the people worshipped gods and goddesses who were guilty of such heinous sins as rape, incest, and murder. It is understandable that Socrates became controversial when he buttonholed people on their way to the temple and asked them why they offered sacrifices to gods who were more sinful than themselves.

Socrates saw his question-asking mission as ordained of God, for he would say things like, "I will go about testing and examining every man whom I think wise as God has commanded me." Like a prophet of the Old Testament he would say, "I am in very great poverty by reason of my service to God." And like other prophets he had a hard time of it because he would tell the seers of Athens, "I believe that only God is really wise." And like New Testament apostles he would say, "Athenians, I hold you in the highest regard and love; but I will obey God rather than you." And he was no less prophetic when he said, "I think that I am the gadfly that God has sent to the city to attack it." He always believed that he was directed by "the sign of God." Once the court found him guilty of corrupting the youth and ruled that he should die by drinking hemlock, he said to his judges, "Now the time has come and we must go hence. Ito die and you to live. Whether life or death is better is known to God and to God only."

While Socrates preached the one God of heaven to a pagan world, there is no evidence that he had any contact with the Hebrew prophets or with any of their writings that may have begun to circulate by the fifth century B.C., and the Jews were the only ones that we know of at that time who had a monotheistic faith. Where then did Socrates get his belief in one God? From the same source that Abraham, another pagan, got his faith, from God himself, who has never left himself without witness even among the pagan nations. God reveals himself through nature, through reason, and through consciousness. Socrates believed he found the true God of heaven in his own moral consciousness, a conviction that was confirmed by reason and the moral nature of the universe.

Socrates was not only a prophet to the pagan world but a tutor unto Christ, for he helped prepare the Greek mind for the coming of the gospel. He was probably the first thinker to speak of man having an immortal soul. Even as he faced death he drew a distinction between the spirit of man and the body in which the spirit resides. When one of

his disciples raised the question of how he should be buried, he responded that if anyone had any idea of burying Socrates he would have to be quick, for he would be making his flight from this world. When the disciple made it clear that some disposition would have to be made of his body, Socrates replied that they could do with his body as they pleased, but that they would not be burying Socrates. Such amazing insights as this helped to prepare the Greek mind for Christian concepts.

The old philosopher was convinced that he was called of God to make his fellow Athenians aware of their ignorance, and in doing this he spoke of one God while those around him paid homage to all sorts of gods. Believing as he did that God has placed universal truths deep within man's moral consciousness, he explored the mind in search of ideas, using the technique of question and answer. He gave the world what is known as dialectic or the Socratic method, which assumes that truth will emerge from the morass of error and superstition in the crucible of competing ideas, somewhat like churning produces butter.

What an amazing figure Socrates was in the streets of Athens! Clad in the same threadbare tunic summer and winter and barefoot, he walked leisurely and with little concern among the great and small alike, insisting that the unexamined life is not worth living and that "Know thyself" is the beginning of wisdom. More than most Christians seem to, he took no thought of the morrow, sacrificing any self interest to the pursuit of truth. And in all this he saw himself not simply as a gadfly, of which there were many in ancient Greece, but as God's gadfly. Like Jesus who came 400 years afterward, Socrates boldly challenged pretense and hypocrisy, and his humility of spirit attracted the simple people around him. He had a way of saying "I know nothing," by which he meant that there is so much that he did not know that he could declare himself ignorant.

And yet the Oracle of Delphi, the official seer, declared Socrates the wisest man in Athens. He set out to prove the Oracle wrong. He interviewed all those in the city who were reputed to be wise, only to discover that they all supposed they knew when they did not. Socrates at last conceded that the Oracle was right. He was the wisest, for he realized he did not know while others supposed they did know!

One of Socrates' noblest gifts was Plato, his brilliant student who became the world's greatest philosopher. But one invites trouble when he gathers young men around him and encourages them to think boldly, freely, and independently. It cost Socrates his life, for a major charge against him in court was that he corrupted the youth of Athens. He had an amusing way of responding to his critics. When they granted him a last request, as was

customary for a condemned man, he asked them to corrupt his sons as he had corrupted theirs! It was his way of saying that knowledge of the right kind is a virtue while willful ignorance is a sin.

To encourage people to think is dangerous. Socrates took his chance because he had confidence in human nature and believed in the power of reason. A confirmed optimist, he believed that truth will out. He avowed faith in a most unusual proposition, that no evil can befall a good man, not even execution, for even in death he goes to be with God and the wisest of the ages.

If Socrates lived in our day he would insist that the unexamined life is no more worth living today than it was in his time. And self-examination can be a painful experience. Who, for instance, wants to face the fact that he is ignorant, prejudiced, or sectarian? So we resort to self-deception, a game hard to play with the likes of Socrates around. Moreover, Socrates believed in a rare virtue, the cultivation of the soul. One cannot nurture his soul aright, Socrates taught, until he comes to see how superficial, ignorant, and prejudiced most of his thinking really is.

Once Socrates was dead, one of his disciples described him as "the wisest, the justest, and best of men whom I have ever known." It is amazing, isn't it, how often men who morally impact their age are martyred by the very ones they seek to liberate? One writer has cautioned us never to forget two men who sought to change their world — one they poisoned, the other they crucified. — *the Editor*

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WHAT DOES A PREACHER DO WHEN HIS WIFE IS LESBIAN?

(Since the story told herein was recently made public at the Central Church of Christ in St. Louis, I am not revealing any secrets. Besides, I have permission from the minister involved to use his experience in any way that might help others. Even so we will identify the minister and his wife only by their first names. — *Editor)*

It was both a dramatic and traumatic moment when Barry, the minister of the Central Church of Christ in St. Louis, had some things to say about homosexuality in his Sunday morning sermon — and then announced to the congregation that his wife was Lesbian! It was dramatic because it brought into the church and even the pulpit, to the amazement of the congregation, a problem that they had only heard about out there in the world. It was traumatic because the minister spoke with a broken heart, after years of futile efforts to

solve an insolvable problem, and the congregation, previously unaware of his dilemma, agonized with him. He told them that what he was revealing to them was not only controversial but it would bar him from most churches.

The minister humbly told his people that he did not want to be a stumbling block to anyone, and he did not want the minister of the Central church to be a bad example because of a failed marriage. He would resign. He has since left St. Louis and is doing graduate studies until he can get his ministry back on track.

In his sermon he laid on his congregation a question that was probably the most demanding he had ever asked them: "What do we do with Rene?," which was both the title of his sermon and a reference to his homosexual wife. He told Rene's gripping story to the astonished assembly even as she sat among them.

He told how while Rene was growing up she always had trouble fitting into the role that was expected of her by her parents and by society. As a teenager she did not like who she was. She was barely 18 when she and Barry married, and it soon became evident that she also had a problem being a wife. Rene was not sure at this time what her problem was, and she subconsciously denied what was becoming evident to her. Two years after the marriage she became acquainted with people with whom she could identify, gays and Lesbians, and at last faced the fact that she too was homosexual.

But she refused to yield to such a fate. She and Barry moved to another town and recommitted their lives to the Lord. She turned her problem over to God and struggled to change what she was. It was a struggle that had no end and it virtually consumed her.

Years passed and they were at last with the Central church in St. Louis. On that Sunday morning Barry said to the church, "I did not realize these past three or four years that Rene had been struggling so hard with this. About six weeks ago she came tome in tears, 'God made me wrong,' she cried. The struggle had worn her out. She couldn't go on any longer pretending to be someone she wasn't." After several weeks of counseling they decided to separate, a decision that was not made lightly, for they knew it would hurt many people. Fortunately there were no children to list among the casualties of another broken home.

Barry is now furthering his education in Oklahoma. Rene has joined the Metropolitan Community Church in St. Louis, a denomination for (but not exclusively for) gays and Lesbians, where she has found some relief from the sordid and promiscuous gay lifestyle of which she disapproves. While the MCC does approve of homosexual relations, it seeks to instill Christian discipline and moderation in the lives of its members. Barry says that Rene is a very spiritual person and he is thankful that there is a church that will accept her as she is, though he supposes that she will have some doctrinal problems in moving from the

Church of Christ to the MCC. I am impressed by the way he writes to me of his loving concern for her wellbeing. He has loved his way through the tragedy. He has been badly hurt but he seems to understand, and understanding makes all the difference in the world.

But what impresses me most is the question he laid on his congregation and on us all in the Churches of Christ. What *are* we going to do with Rene and all the others like her in our midst?

Barry told his church that whatever they may think of homosexuality Rene should not be treated as a leper. He told them that she is just like the rest of them — kind, responsible, loving — except in one respect, she is gay. He is convinced that Rene did not choose to be gay, that she has been that way since childhood. He referred to some of the passages about homosexual behavior and concluded that they refer to lustful, inordinate, and wicked behavior on the part of people who are in rebellion against God, and that Rene is not that kind of person. And yet she is homosexual.

He spoke of the pain that gays suffer, especially those who are Christians and long to be accepted. Some are driven to drugs, alcohol, and even suicide. He told of a friend of his, a young man in one of our Christian colleges, a dedicated Christian, who keeps falling in love, but always with a man, a compulsion that is beyond his control. He is so pained by it all that he would commit suicide, except that he realizes this too would be wrong. Barry then told his church that while he cannot approve of the gay lifestyle, "God did not make me judge, so I choose to withhold judgment on those homosexual Christians who choose to accept their homosexuality."

That was his answer as to what to do with Rene — accept her, without necessarily approving of all that she may believe or do. It is not clear what his congregation decided to do with Rene. The reaction was probably mixed. He closed his sermon by telling them that there was a church for homosexuals who would accept Rene as she is, which I suppose implied that the Church of Christ is not such a church.

It was indeed an unusual sermon and it must have been an unforgettable experience, a minister laying bare his agonizing soul and resigning because his wife is Lesbian. Is is beyond our spiritual resources to deal with a problem like that? Can we not at least show compassion and weep like Jesus did? Must we be so much alike that we cannot deal constructively with a problem of that sort? Could not the church allow Barry and Rene to separate and yet remain in the church and in the ministry, while working out their difficulties in an atmosphere of love, forbearance, and longsuffering?

If we were that kind of a church, it might be that many in the world out there would say, "That is what I have been looking for!" Many people are like Barry and Rene, wounded and pained by a cruel and uncaring world. If the church cannot he a halfway house for such troubled souls, how different is it from the world?

What would Jesus do with Rene? He would not of course approve of any sin in her life, but he would be forbearing and accepting. He came to our troubled world to seek, to save, and to heal, not to condemn. The irresistible Christ! If the church on earth which bears his name could only be like him! — *the Editor*

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PRIVATE INTERPRETATION

Cecil Hook

The radio preacher assured us that the speakers on his program would give us only the simple Bible message without any private interpretation. He warned us about the evil of interpreting the Scriptures, but we could depend upon him to give us the truth, not interpretations. That sounds great, doesn't it?

Every English version of the Bible is an interpretation of God's message delivered originally in the ancient languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The translations are interpretations made by uninspired men.

The message of the Bible is conveyed through symbols which must be interpreted to be of value. First, letters of our alphabet are symbols which make up words which are more complex symbols. The illiterate person does not know what letter and words symbolize; hence, he cannot understand a written message. If one cannot interpret the symbols, that person cannot gain the message.

When a person reads the Scriptures aloud to others, that person is interpreting the character symbols into words which symbolize meanings, ideas, and concepts. If a person hears those words ever so clearly but does not know their meaning, he or she has not profited. There must be an interpretation in order to bring understanding. If the speaker reads the words that produce no understanding, he is wasting his time.

Many speakers have denounced persons who would attempt to interpret the Scriptures. Yet those speakers never confine their activity to the simple reading of the Bible. They always offer comments. Those comments are an effort to enable the hearer to understand. That is interpreting the Scriptures!

This aversion to interpreting the Scriptures comes from a misinterpretation of 2 Peter 1:20f. where the apostle declares, "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." In this setting Peter is assuring us that we do not follow cleverly devised myths when we accept the account of the eyewitnesses of his majesty or the messages revealed to prophets of the Lord. Those prophets did not depend upon their own interpretation of events which they witnessed or put their own construction on the messages revealed to them. They received revelations of truth from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit. None of us receives such revelations today.

So, we have the prophetic word made more sure. But we still must understand what these prophets wrote for it to benefit us. That understanding can come only through our interpreting the words which they left us.

Even though all of us have the same prophetic word today, all of us do not understand it alike. All of us can welcome explanations from others even as the Ethiopian nobleman did when Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" Our reply should be like his, "How can I unless some one guides me?"

There are two consolations. First, our salvation is not dependent upon a correct interpretation and understanding of all of God's word. Second, even though we may profit from the interpretations of persons more schooled in the Scriptures than we are, we are not obligated to accept their interpretations. — *1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, TX 78130*

"OUR BROTHERS IN THE DENOMINATIONS"

"Brethren of all denominations." All these long years most of us in Churches of Christ-Christian Churches have not allowed ourselves to talk like that. Even if we might think it, and most of us probably do, we do not say it. It is our unwritten creed that our sisters and brothers are all in what we call the Church of Christ. While we often refer to "the denominations," in contrast to "the Lord's church" (meaning us!), we do not refer to our brethren in the denominations. In this short piece I want to show that this sectarian mentality is of recent date, for our founding fathers did not have this narrow view of brotherhood.

The phrase is in quotation marks because it is taken from Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*, which dates back to 1809 and is one of our founding documents. The *Address* is in fact written "To all that love our Lord Jesus Christ, throughout all the

Churches." It is clear that he considers those in all the churches who love the Lord Jesus Christ as his brothers and sisters. Time and again in the document he refers to "our brethren" and "our brethren in all the denominations," and at least once he refers to them as "Our dear brethren of all denominations." While he recognizes that they are divided into parties, he still refers to them as "our Christian brethren, however unhappily distinguished by party names."

He refers to these brethren in the denominations as both the Christian Church and Church of Christ, such as "so that we might return to the original constitutional unity of the Christian Church," and "all the Churches of Christ which mutually acknowledge each other as such." He is not calling any one denomination or even all of them together the Church of Christ, but rather the Christians in all the denominations. What he sees as the Church of Christ transcends any sect or denomination.

That is the basis upon which he set forth in the same document his first great proposition on unity, often quoted by our people through the years: "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."

Thomas Campbell did not suppose he had to refer to "the Church of Christ" with a lower case c, as our folk are wont to do, supposing that by using "the church of Christ" they are affirming nondenominational status. In all such references as those above Campbell consistently uses the capital C for church, whether Church of Christ or Christian Church, as I notice most scholars do when they refer to the church universal. It says something about where we've been (or not been) when we fastidiously use "the church of Christ" and refer to less than all Christians, while others use "the Church of Christ" when referring to the universal church made up of all believers.

Campbell also says in the *Declaration and Address* ,"This, we are persuaded, is the uniform sentiment of the real Christians of every denomination," referring to his plea for unity among all believers. This explains why the Stone-Campbell movement was an effort to "unite the Christians in all the sects." They were not trying to unite or amalgamate the denominations, but to unite "the real Christians" in the denominations.

It is impressive that Campbell did all this writing about "the Church of Christ" while he yet did not have a single congregation that would eventually wear this name. This means he saw the true church as made up of all his dear brethren wherever they were and whatever party name they might be wearing, and this church has always existed, ever since the Holy Spirit breathed it into existence.

It not only existed, but it was by its very nature one, even if scattered among the sects. Christ's body cannot be divided! And so he wrote in that document, "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."

It would be wonderfully liberating if we could all, like Thomas Campbell, refer to "our dear brothers and sisters in the denominations," and realize that we are all together the true Church of Christ upon earth. —*the Editor*

Love looks through a telescope; envy, through a microscope. --Henry *Wheeler Shaw*

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CHRIST, OUR IMAGE OF GOD

Robert L. Johnson

It appears that God's judgment will be contingent on something besides a legal observance. A person's knowledge or his lack of knowledge may affect the degree of his responsibility. It is clearly another matter with those who profess to have the Spirit or mind of Christ, for "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9). Many people who bear the name of Christ do not reflect his Spirit. As the late Prof. Charles Roberson of Abilene Christian University used to say, "The sins of the disposition will send one to hell just as fast as sins of the flesh." Paul lists for us the virtues which he calls the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22). He adds "against such there is no law." The presence of God's Spirit in any man can only be verified by the results.

If God's wrath is meted out on the basis of legal observance, then Jesus wasted his time in presenting the Judgment Scene in Mt. 25. There was of course the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," which the "good guys" might have been observing when they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, and clothed the naked. But it doesn't appear that they were engaged in law-keeping in order to gain points. Their actions seem rather to have emanated from a spirit of love and compassion. As Jesus said, "The good man out of the treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good" (Lk. 6:45).

When the image of God that begins to take shape in our minds is still faint, it can be brought into better focus as we look at Jesus, who said, "He that hath seen me has seen the Father." As we look at Jesus we sec that he was concerned with all kinds of sin, but espe-

cially with pride, bigotry, smugness, prejudice, and intolerance. These are sins most everybody denounces but nobody confesses. We assume that these are the most dangerous sins since Jesus denounced them the most. The Lord takes special aim at the Pharisees who tried to impress others with their legalistic correctness. They were self-righteous and intolerant toward those who differed with them.

Jesus was critical of those who called attention to their own righteousness, and he was impatient with those who were arrogant and had a censorious spirit. He tells us in Lk. 6:37, "Judge not and you will not be judged; condemn not and you will not be condemned," and in Lk. 6:41, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not see the log that is in your own eye?" We all have not only specks and splinters but objects of greater magnitude. However, as George Buttrick says, "A proper humility will allow God to determine which arc the tares and which the wheat."

Jesus is not of course saying that we are to be blind to the sins of our age. We are taught in other places in the Bible, such as 2 Thess. 3:14-15 and 1 Cor 5:11, that we are to admonish one another regarding sin. But we are not blameless. It is God's prerogative to forgive and not ours to establish the limits of His grace.

In constructing an image of God we are at least to see that He is a God who deals fairly and righteously with us. And He expects His will to be done. He holds people responsible according to their knowledge, and His judgment is real. He is gracious and merciful and abounds in steadfast love. He is like a Father. Jesus his Son shows us the Father more clearly than any conceptual knowledge that we can project. As Spirit, God is not far from any one of us, for we have our being in Him. For us to have the Spirit of the Son is a requisite of the spiritual life. God is love and if a man loves God he must love his brother also.

God has not left us without witness nor has he given us an uncertain course to follow, but the best that men have ever done is only an approximation to the ideal which ought to characterize the followers of Christ.

Charles Roberson was also fond of saying, "What a man thinks of God will determine his conduct." Or to put another way, "What image a person has of God will be the image he projects to his contemporaries." But if that image is distorted through faulty interpretation, or if one is affirming a position only because it is affirmed by someone else, then one is compounding the error and may be doing irreparable damage to himself and to the cause of Christ.

As Sabatier wrote, "The habit we have gotten into of putting all the truth on our side and all error on the side of others not only falsifies the judgment, but it sours the heart and poisons piety. It dries up the feeling of fraternity and is the perpetual sign of individual and collective vanity."

Our attempts to define Deity, except as seen in Christ, will usually betray the limitation of our mind. We are finite minds reaching out for a Reality that extends infinitely beyond us. But still we accept Paul's word, "He is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28).

In a volume of prayers Momay Williams gives us these words, "0 God, who has' made man in thine own likeness ... teach us the unity of our family, and the breadth of thy love ... enable us ... to enter into the fellowship of the whole human family; and forbid that from pride or hardness of heart, we should despise or neglect any for whom Christ died or injure any in whom he lives ..."

Finally, the words of R. W. Church a century ago find a ready response in my heart:

> There is so much inevitable ignorance in our judgments now, so much mistake, so much exaggeration in what we praise and in what we condemn; so much good of which we know and imagine nothing; such strength of virtue which we never suspect, never give men credit for, such depths of sin which perhaps here are never found out. Who can doubt what awful discrepancies will, in many cases, appear between God's judgment and ours, beyond the veil?

"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). *—2208 W. Granite, Siloam Springs, AR 72761*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Ouida and I recently celebrated our 46th by having dinner out and going to see the movie "Driving Miss Daisy," which we thought was super, a movie we highly recommend. If Hollywood did more of that kind of cinema it could be called repentance. We agreed that the last scene in the nursing home was not only one of the finest we ever saw on the silver screen but one that depicted a spirit that heals wounds and mends relationships both in the world and in the church. This also means that we are about to forget my recent surgery and get on with more important things. I am even hack to my early morning jaunt, but I will

walk instead of run for awhile yet. I must still return to Houston soon for final tests, but we are confident that all is well. Your loving concern lifted our spirits in a time of trial. We are thankful to you.

My dear friend Mark Berrier of Dallas Christian College told me this interesting story. He was approached on the parking lot of the Christian Church he attends by a Buddhist couple from Vietnam who wanted him to marry them. They wanted no ceremony, no vows, nothing, except to satisfy the law. He told them that he had a rule that he would marry anyone who would agree to talking with him two hours. They agreed to this. Mark recounted such Buddhist principles as the four noble truths and the eight-fold path, telling the couple that he believed these were truths given to Buddha by the God of heaven long before Christ came to earth. He asked them if they were able to live by such high moral standards. They admitted that they could not. This is what sin is, Mark pointed out. He asked them how their sins could be forgiven. No way. Buddha died and he remains in his tomb, and he was but a man who could not forgive sin and would be dismayed that his followers would pray to him or worship him, Mark observed, to which they agreed. Mark pointed to the empty tomb of Christ and noted that he is able to forgive sins because he was more than a man and one who knew no sin. He continues to visit with them. And how did he marry them with no ceremony, no vows, nothing? He asked them, "You do want to get married?," and when they said yes he signed their certificate and mailed it to the county clerk. I told him that this is a good example of how a minister in performing a marriage ceremony is not an agent of the church but of the state.

Recently in his *California Letter* J. James Albert referred to the way the Baptists treated Alexander Campbell, branding him as schismatic, which led Campbell to ask whether it is the separatist or the separated that is the schismatic. Albert thinks Church of Christ leaders need to ponder this question, considering the way we sometimes treat each other. He asks, "If a brother says you shall neither think nor speak differently from me; and thus compels me to surrender my independence or to withdraw from him, is he or I the schismatic?" If you want on his mailing list, no charge, the address is Box 811, Corcoran, Ca. 93212.

On March 10 Billy Graham will have an outdoor evangelistic rally at the Berlin Wall, the first such ecumenical gathering uniting East and West Germany in over 30 *years*. The vast gathering of Christians from both Germanys will be next to the historic Brandenburg Gate. Hundreds of churches on both sides of the wall, who have had hardly any contact with each other for over 40 years, are cooperating in this effort. Graham hopes that this one great outdoor Christian witness will be a testimonial to the world of the spiritual dimension of freedom.

Don Wildmon of American Family Association, which Ouida and I help sup-port, is doing a great service for both the nation and the church in monitoring TV programs in terms of indecency and anti-Christian bias. He reports that no other group, whether Jews, blacks, women, even gays, is treated with such bigotry as Christians. His organization has had considerable success in recent years in doing something about it by way of boycotts and letter writing, for many leading sponsors have dropped offensive programs. The address is Drawer 2440, Tupelo, Ms. 38803

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READER'S EXCHANGE

We have a work camp and a health center in Jamaica that our congregation supports, and we plan to put in a new water system and repair roofing destroyed by "Gilbert." We have had several work parties to go there. We are delighted that our people are willing to pay their own way, supply their own material, and take off two weeks to make the trip and do the work. We have 20 or more adults and youth for such trips. —*Forrest Haggard, Overland Park Christian Church, Overland Park, Ks. 66204*

I sense a growing revolution against the institutional church and the professional clergy. If we can cling to the basic concerns of the primitive faith, it is all to the good. — *Norman Parks, Murfreesboro, Tn.*

I appreciate your advice about not leaving the Church of Christ. We need those who have overcome the sin of sectarianism. They should stay with us if at all possible. If all those who find freedom in Christ leave us, how will we make progress? We are much more effective working from within. Most of our folk want to love their brothers and sisters in other churches. They only need to be shown that it is OK to do so. — *Eddie Creighton, Melbourne, Ar.*

I love Restoration history, and your book on the subject is a treasure. I read it from an Old Path, United Kingdom stand-point, which makes me a hit difference from most. — *Ivan Davidson, Glasgow Scotland.*

Your article on not knowing the future, struck me that on an individual basis the Lord is coming soon for each of us, for our life is "as a vapor." He is coming soon for me, and for you, even if the judgment is 20,000 years away, for we have only a short time to live for God. Then it will be living with God. —*Gene Peacock, Little Rock, Ar.*

Two ministers given to arguing about their respective faiths were in a very heated discussion. '"That's all right," said one calmly. "We'll just agree to disagree. After all, we're both doing the Lord's work — you in your way and I in His." — *Bulletin, Webster Groves Christian Church, St. Louis, Mo.*

I praise God for your work and for those of like mind. Everywhere you look you see evidence of a fresh breeze blowing through God's temple--clearing away a lot of traditions and sectarian spirits.--*Randy Massie, Louisville, Oh.*

Once I opposed a brother to his face after he publicly maligned you and Carl Ketcherside, by name no less. His defense was to accuse me of being a disciple of the two of you. My reply was that I had only one Lord and Jesus was he, and it was only coincidental that I agree with you and Carl. It seems that people are now realizing that unity is a cardinal principle of sound doctrine. Thanks to you and Carl for the part you have played in effecting this trend.--*Randy Travis, Madisonville, Ky.*

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BOOK NOTES

Olan Hicks has done us a great service in questioning our traditional position on divorce and remarriage. His larger book on this subject, often listed in this column, is now out of print but a new edition is expected. He now has a 96-page condensation entitled *Divorce and Remarriage: The Issue Made Clear,* which has all the basic stuff. We will send you a copy for $4.50 postpaid.

R. L. Gibson's *Christian, You Were Baptized In Water and Spirit* argues persuasively that every real Christian receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit when he becomes a Christian. He supports his position by a host of scholarly references both inside and outside our tradition. This book will challenge your thinking. $7.95 postpaid.

The Bleating Sheep by Robert Blackshear is saying, as the title implies, that God's people eager to be fed, but they ***are*** hindered by a system more interested in preserving itself than in feeding God's sheep. The problem, the author argues, is that elders and evangelists are not doing the work God ordained them to do. Extensive use of material from Carl Ketcherside does not hurt the author's case. $6.50 postpaid.

Carl Ketcherside's autobiography, *Pilgrimage of Joy,* with an introduction by Leroy Garrett, will soon be off the press. If you send us your order now, you get the prepublication price of $15.00 postpaid.

A new book titled *Kingdom Come* by John V. Taylor, a retired Anglican bishop, takes the reader on a journey to and into the kingdom that Jesus made the manifesto of his ministry. At the heart of Jesus' faith was "Thy kingdom come," so this book seeks to understand what he meant by that. $9.50 postpaid.

We will send you 18 back issues of this paper, selected at random by us, for only $3.00. Back issues are otherwise .50 each.

You can get a free copy of *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett when you send us a club of 8 subs to this paper at $3.00 each, total of $24.00, but you must request the book when you send in the club.

We have a fresh supply of a two perennial best sellers, both by K. C. Moser, one of the first in the Church of Christ to base his preaching upon the grace of God. They are *The Gist of Romans* and *The Way of Salvation.* These books live on, and there's a reason why. They are $6.50 each, postpaid.

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